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# Cyprus spy ring inquiry

By BRIAN SILK

THE Government admitted yesterday that a spy network has been using a group of British Servicemen to penetrate the secret communications centre on Cyprus.

Lord Trefgarne, Under-Secretary for the Armed Forces, disclosed that "a number of personnel" were being questioned about alleged leaks of classified information from the island's listening post, which is in direct contact with GCHQ at Cheltenham.

The Director of Public Prosecutions' office also confirmed that it had sent a representative to Cyprus and his report is awaited.

Following Lord Trefgarne's statement, the Ministry of Defence refused to specify how many Servicemen were under suspicion.

But a spokesman dismissed the suggestion that between 30 and 40 were being questioned. "It is a very small number, literally a handful," he said.

However, the fact of a spying operation involving more than one isolated leak is bound to contribute to the alarm already raised over the security situation at Cheltenham.

## Highly sensitive

The centre on the east coast of Cyprus, between Larnaca and Famagusta, monitors highly sensitive diplomatic and military traffic passing through the turbulent Middle East.

Access to such information is considered to be of high value to the Arab world, as well as the Soviet bloc.

Lord Trefgarne's statement came in a letter to Mr Ted Leadbitter, Labour MP for Hartlepool, who had raised the issue with him.

It was Mr Leadbitter who tabled the question which led to the identification of the traitor Anthony Blunt in November, 1979.

Lord Trefgarne's letter to him states: "Our personnel are more at risk in a place such as Cyprus and we go to considerable lengths to remind all of them to be most careful about security at all times."

"In spite of these precautions it now seems likely that classified information has been passed to unauthorised recipients. We are still in the

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# Cyprus spy inquiry

midst of investigations and a number of personnel are assisting with inquiries.

"While these continue it is rather too early to assess the significance of the matter and what charges will be made."

Concern about security at the Cyprus centre arose last month after it became known that a senior aircraftsman was being questioned about the unauthorised disclosure of information.

He had been picked up by a woman in an island discotheque and then offered sexual favours in return for information.

The airman reported the matter to his superiors and this led to suspicion that a "Mata Hari" spy system might be in operation with British Servicemen as the target.

A number of Servicemen under suspicion are understood to have been sent back to the U.K., where they have been

interviewed by Special Branch officers.

The possibility of Servicemen being blackmailed for information following homosexual indiscretions is also believed to be scrutinised.

Mr Leadbitter said: "Cyprus is an important strategic base and a very important listening post of the Cheltenham kind in that part of the Mediterranean."

"I look upon this letter as signifying the gravity the Ministry of Defence attaches to the revelations because there is already at this stage an admission that classified material has been passed to unauthorised people."

The Ministry of Defence last night refused to give any information about the number of men employed at the Cyprus communications centre. They are believed to be mainly Royal Air Force personnel, with some Army signalmen.